

TO THOSE WHO ARE “ALMOST PERSUADED” NO. 871

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD’S-DAY MORNING, MAY 16, 1869,
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*“Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost you persuade me to be a Christian.”
Acts 26:28.*

NOTWITHSTANDING his bonds, Paul is to be envied that he had an opportunity of addressing himself to kings and rulers, and that once at least in his life he stood before the great master of the Roman world, the Emperor himself. To reach the ignorant who sit on thrones is no mean feat for benevolence. Alas! the Gospel seldom climbs the high places of rank and dignity. It is a great act of God’s mercy towards nobles and princes when they have the opportunity of hearing a faithful Gospel discourse.

Highly favored was Edward VI to have such a preacher as Hugh Latimer, to tell him to his face the truth as it is in Jesus. And much favored was Agrippa, though he scarcely appreciated the privilege, to listen to so earnest an advocate of the Gospel of Jesus as Paul the apostle. We ought to pray much more than we do for men in high places, because they have many bewitching temptations, and less gracious opportunities than even the humblest paupers. There is less likelihood of the Gospel ever affecting their hearts than of its converting the poor and needy. We should make them, therefore, especially the subjects of supplication, and then we might hope to see consecrated coronets far more frequently.

Should a preacher be called to address himself to kings, he could not follow a better model than the apostle Paul, whom we may fitly call the king of preachers, and the preacher to kings. His speech is extremely forcible, and yet exceedingly courteous. It is powerful in matter, but graceful in manner. It is bold, but remarkably unobtrusive—never cringing, but never impertinent.

The apostle speaks much of himself, for so his argument required, but still, nothing *for* himself, nor by way of self-commendation. The whole address is so skillfully shaped with such a sacred art, and yet with such a holy naturalness, that if any human persuasion could have converted Agrippa to the faith, the address of the Lord’s prisoner was most likely to have done so. The line of argument was so suited to the prejudices and tastes of Agrippa, as to be another instance of Paul’s power to become “all things to all men.”

Now, it may be, this morning, while we are speaking upon the apostle’s teaching and the results of it, that a great blessing may rest upon us so that many of you may be persuaded to be Christians by the very arguments which failed with the Herodian king. Not many great men after the flesh, not many mighty are called, but this assembly is of another order, and O may the Lord extend His sovereign grace along our ranks, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

I. This morning I shall ask you to spend a little time in considering THE GREAT OBJECT OF THE CHRISTIAN MINISTER’S PERSUASIONS.

Agrippa said, “Almost you persuade me *to be a Christian*.” I do not recollect a single sermon from this text that is fairly upon the words as they stand. They are all discourses upon being *almost* Christians, which, begging the pardon of the venerable divines, has nothing to do with the text, for the apostle never persuaded Agrippa to be almost a Christian—but he almost persuaded him to be a Christian altogether.

Agrippa certainly never was an almost-Christian. His life and character displayed a spirit very far removed from that condition. He was not like the young man in the Gospel to whom the name “almost-Christian” is far more applicable, although I gravely question its propriety in any case. There is a great difference between being almost a Christian, and being almost persuaded to be a Christian. A man may

be almost a Calvinist, and so may hold most of the doctrines of grace, but another who has been on a certain occasion almost persuaded to be a Calvinist, may be, as a matter of fact, a complete Arminian. A man who is almost an artist knows something of painting, but a man almost persuaded to be an artist may not even know the names of the colors.

Now the great drift of Paul's preaching, according to Agrippa's confession, was to persuade him to be a Christian. And the apostle himself acknowledges the same design in his concluding sentence, "I would to God, that not only you, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost and altogether such as I am." In that parting word of goodwill, he unveiled the desire of his heart. He sought not release from his chains, but the deliverance of the souls of his hearers from the bondage of sin.

My brothers, the preaching of the Gospel minister should always have soul-winning for its object. Never should we seek that the audience should admire our excellency of speech. I have in my soul a thousand times cursed oratory, and wished that the arts of elocution had never been devised, or at least had never profaned the sanctuary of God. For often, as I have listened with wonder to speech right well-conceived, and sentences aptly arranged, I have yet felt as though I could weep tears of blood that the time of the congregation on the Sabbath should be wasted by listening to wordy rhetoric, when what was wanted was a plain, urgent pleading with men's hearts and consciences.

It is never worth a minister's while to go up his pulpit stairs to show his audience that he is adept in elocution. High-sounding words and flowery periods are a mockery of man's spiritual needs. If a man desires to display his oratory, let him study for the bar, or enter Parliament, but let him not degrade the cross of Christ into a peg to hang his tawdry rags of speech upon. The cross is only lifted up aright when we can say, "Not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power." Every minister should be able to say with Paul, "Seeing, then, that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech." No, my dear hearers, may it never be in any measure or degree an object of ours to flash and coruscate, and dazzle, and astonish, but may we keep this one aim in view, namely, to persuade you to be Christians.

Neither would the apostle have been content if he could have persuaded Agrippa to take the name of a Christian, or to be baptized as a Christian. His object was that he might in very deed *be* a Christian. To seem is nothing, but *to be* is everything. I grant you that the apostle would have been glad enough to see Agrippa avowedly a Christian. Why should he not take the name if he had received the essential grace? He would have rejoiced to have baptized him. Why should he not, if he believed in Jesus?

But the apostle was not anxious to confer misleading names. Nominal Christians he had no desire to create. To be or not to be was his great question—names and rites were secondary matters. It would not be worth the snap of a finger to Christianize a nation after the manner in which the zealous Francis Xavier made converts by sprinkling their heathen foreheads with a brush of holy water. It were scarce worth rising from one's bed to persuade an avowed son of Belial to put on the cloak of a religious profession and practice his vices in decorous secrecy.

No, the persuasion of the apostle aims at Agrippa being a Christian indeed and of a truth. Thus should we labor in seeking converts—the adoption of a certain dress or mode of speech is little. Union with our denomination is almost as unimportant. The true embracing of Jesus as the Savior of men is the vital matter. To bring men to be Christians, "this is the work, this the labor."

The apostle does not appear to have aimed at merely making the man a convert as to his judgment, or a trembler as to his feelings, or an enthusiast as to his passions. Is it not sometimes evidently the drift of Christian ministers to make men weep for weeping's sake? Funeral rites are paraded, and sepulchers unveiled. Mournful memories are awakened, and half-healed wounds ruthlessly torn open, and this laceration of the natural feelings is supposed to be a process peculiarly conducive to conversion.

I have no faith in such appeals. I want men's tears for other sorrows than those connected with the dead, I beg their heart's regard to a far more important occupation than garlanding the memories of the departed. Is it not very possible to work up a congregation to the highest possible state of excitement upon their bereavements, and yet after all have gained no step in advance in the direction of their eternal

salvation? The deaths of the Herod family might have been worked into a touching appeal to Agrippa, but Paul was too manly to attempt the sentimentalist’s effeminate discoursing.

Neither did the apostle excite Agrippa’s patriotic sensibilities by rehearsing the glorious deeds of ancient Jewish valor with which the world had rung. No glowing stanzas of heroic verse, or thrilling legend of chivalry were embossed upon his address. But in all simplicity the apostle aimed at this one thing—to convince the monarch’s judgment as to change his heart, so far to affect his passions as by the power of the Holy Ghost to make a new man of him. This, this only, would content the apostolic orator, that his auditor might be a Christian, that he might be such a one as Paul also was, the Lord’s servant, relying upon Christ’s righteousness, and living for Christ’s glory.

Now, it is well for the preacher to know what he is at, and it is well for the hearers to know what the preacher desires to have them do or be. Why, brethren and sisters, I trust my heart’s desire is precisely that which ruled the apostle. I long that every one of you may be a Christian. Ah, my Lord, I pray You bear me witness that the one thing I strive after is that this people may know Your truth and trust Your Son, and be saved by Your Holy Spirit—saved in their outward lives, and eternally saved in the day of Your appearing. Whatever else shall come out of my preaching, though your liberality should be superabundant, though your morality should be untarnished, though your assemblings together should never decrease in numbers, though your enthusiasm should never abate in intensity, yet if you are not altogether Christians, made so by the new birth, and by the power of the Holy Ghost, I shall regard my ministry as a miserable failure—a failure full of grief to me, and of confusion to you. O may God grant that many here may be altogether and at once persuaded to be Christians, for nothing but this will content me.

If you desire a definition of a Christian, the apostle has given it to you in the eighteenth verse of the chapter from which the text is selected. He there gives a fivefold description of the true Christian. He is one whose eyes are opened, who has been turned from darkness to light—that is to say, he knows the truth of God, and perceives it in quite a different manner from any knowledge of it which he possessed in the past. He sees his sins, and feels their heinousness. He knows the plan of salvation, and rejoices in its all-sufficiency. His knowledge is not superficial, and a thing of the head, but internal, and a matter of the heart. He now knows truly what he only knew theoretically before.

Knowledge is essential to a Christian. Romanism, that owl of night, may delight in ignorance, but true Christianity prays evermore for light. “The LORD is my light, and my salvation”—light first and salvation afterwards. May you all have the opened eye, which is the Spirit’s early gift. The next point of the Christian is conversion, “To turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God.”

The Christian is emancipated from the tyranny of evil, and is free to follow after holiness, and to delight in the commands of God. He is a citizen of a new world, alienated from his former loves and desires, made a fellow citizen of a city with which he had no acquaintance aforetime. He owes no more service to the flesh and the lusts thereof, but the Lord is his lawgiver and his King.

Thirdly, he has received forgiveness of sin. He is pardoned through the precious blood of Christ, and rejoices in the full remission of his sins. Faith has brought him to the cross-foot, faith has led him to the fountain filled with blood, the Holy Ghost has applied the atonement, his conscience is clear. He has received redemption, to wit, the forgiveness of sins. The next, and indeed the essential point in a Christian is faith, “By faith that is in me,” says the Lord. Faith in the crucified and risen Savior. From this root will spring all the other characteristics of the genuine Christian.

Once again, the Christian is a one who is sanctified—that is, set apart, a separated man, a holy man, a sin-hating man, one who loves the commandments of God, and counts it his pleasure to be obedient to them. Such a man has salvation. He has already a part of the inheritance of saints, and he is on his way to that blessed place where he shall receive its full fruition.

It is after this that the Christian minister is always striving, that his hearers may be Christians—be enlightened, be converted, have real and true faith. Be sanctified by the Spirit, be forgiven all their sins,

and made heirs of immortality. Has the ministry which you have attended effected under God this for you? If not, is this great failure the fault of the ministry or your own? O dear hearers, if the blame lie in the ministry, if it be not such preaching as God will really bless, forsake it and attend some other! But if you are conscious that it is a Gospel ministry to which you have listened, because it has been blessed to others by the Holy Spirit, then I ask you, how will you answer for it at the bar of God, that so great a blessing of heaven has been slighted, and how will you excuse yourself for resisting cogent, earnest, affectionate persuasions, all intended to lead you to be a Christian? O confess your sin, that you still halt between two opinions, and remain in the gall of bitterness, and in the bonds of iniquity despite the pleadings of the Word, and the rebukes of your conscience. God grant that such inquiries may have the practical result of humbling and arousing you.

II. Secondly, let us spend two or three minutes in considering THE APOSTOLIC MANNER OF PERSUADING.

Read carefully the notes of Paul’s sermon as given in the chapter before us. In what way did he endeavor to persuade the king? I reply it is noteworthy that Paul made *constant appeals to Scripture*. We say not that he quoted one or more passages, but he insisted from first to last that he spoke no other things than Moses and the prophets did write, and nothing but what the twelve tribes were looking for.

My dear hearers, this ought always to be a powerful argument with *you*. You are as yet unconverted, you are not yet persuaded to be Christians, but yet you believe the Bible to be true. From your childhood you have accepted with reverence the book of God as being inspired. Now, if this book be of God, it is your highest wisdom to be a follower of Christ. And as you dare not reject the book—you have not yet come to that pass—I ask you how you make it consistent with reason, how you reconcile it with conscience and with sound sense that you remain disobedient to its high behests?

That book declares that no foundation can be laid for our eternal hopes but in Christ Jesus, and yet you have not built on that foundation! This book testifies that those who reject the Lord Jesus, and His atonement must perish without mercy. Are you prepared so to perish? It also invites you to build on the foundation of Christ’s sacrificial work, and it promises you infinite security in so doing. Are you willing to reject so great a boon?

If you did not believe the Bible, no argument drawn from it could have any force with you, and therefore the apostle did not quote Scripture to the philosophers on Mars’ Hill. But granted that you accept the Scriptures as God’s Word, as Agrippa did, the apostolic form of reasoning from that Word ought not merely to convince your judgments, but to persuade your hearts, and it would do so if there were not something radically wrong in your hearts—something to be repented of, something to be removed by the power of God’s Holy Spirit.

Observe next, the apostle’s persuasion of Agrippa lay mainly in his *personal testimony to the power of grace in his own soul*. We need not repeat the story of Paul on the road to Damascus, and the bright light, and the sacred voice, and the sinner rising up converted to go forth to bear witness to others of Jesus and of His grace. Personal testimony ought always to weigh with men. Convince me that a man is honest, and then if he bears witness to facts which are matters of his own personal consciousness, not merely the gleanings of hearsay, but things which he has tasted and handled, I am bound to believe him. And especially if his testimony is backed up by others, I dare not deny it—I could not be so unjust.

A great part of the preaching of every Christian minister should lie in his bearing his personal testimony to what Christ has done for him. It was my privilege only last Thursday night to tell you over again for perhaps the thousandth time, how the grace of God has converted, consoled, supported, and benefited me. I did not hesitate to tell how the Holy Spirit led me to the foot of the cross, and by one look at the crucified Redeemer, banished all my guilty fears. I know I speak the truth, my conscience witnesses that I lie not, when I declare that trust in Jesus Christ has changed me so totally that I scarcely know my former self. It has unbound my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness. It has taken the ashes of sorrow from my head, and anointed me with the oil of joy.

Moreover, my testimony does not stand alone, but there are hundreds and thousands who consistently, and without hesitation, declare that faith in Christ has blessed and saved them. Such testimony ought to weigh with you, and it would convince you, were you not desperately set against the Lord’s truth, and so fond of sin. Our testimony to the joy, peace, comfort, and strength, which faith in Jesus brings, ought to be accepted, being corroborated by the witness of thousands of men of undoubted truth, and unblemished character. O that men were wise, and would not resist the counsel of God against themselves!

The apostle added to this twofold reasoning, *a clear statement of the facts of the Gospel*. Notice how he piles precious truths together, and compresses them as with an hydraulic press, in the twenty-third verse, “That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first to rise from the dead, and should show light unto the people, and to the Gentiles.” He was about to complete this summary of Christian divinity when Festus interrupted him. In that verse you have most of the grand truths of the Gospel. It is a ready way to convince men, as far as instrumentality can do it, to tell them clearly that God became incarnate in Christ Jesus, that the incarnate God bore the sin of believers, and suffered in man’s place, that justice might be vindicated. That Jesus rose again, and ascended into heaven to plead the cause of believers before the throne of God, and that pardon, free and full, is proclaimed to every sinner who will simply come and trust in the sufferings of Jesus.

Where the Gospel statement is clearly given, even if no reasoning is used, it will, under God, frequently convince, for it is so marvelously self-evident. Indeed it would convince men universally were not the human heart harder than the nether millstone, and carnal reason deaf as the adder that will not hear the wisest charmer.

The apostle did not close his sermon until he had made *a home appeal to Agrippa*. “King Agrippa,” said he (in something like the style of Nathan when he said, “You are the man!”) “King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe.” He looked him through and through, and read his heart, and to escape that glance, the king suddenly complimented him, and to avoid such close applications of unpalatable truth, withdrew from the place of hearing.

Oh, but this is the way to preach! We must not only argue from the Scriptures, relate our experience, and give clear statements of Gospel truth, but we must also carry the war into the heart. The minister of Christ must know how to take the scaling ladder and fix it against the wall of the conscience, and climb it sword in hand, to meet the man face to face in sacred duel, for the capture of his heart. He must not flinch to tell the faults he knows, or deal with the errors he perceives. There must be a consecrated self-denial about the preacher, so that it matters not to him, even though he should draw down the wrath of his hearer upon his head. One thing he must aim at, that he may persuade him to be a Christian, and for this he must strike home, coming to close quarters, if perhaps by God’s grace he may prick the man in his heart, slay his enmity, and bring him into captivity to Jesus.

Thus have I shown you the modes of persuasion which the apostle used, and the object for which he used them. O that such pleadings would persuade you!

III. Thirdly, consider THE DIFFERING DEGREES OF SUCCESS ATTENDING SUCH PERSUASIONS.

How did Paul succeed? We can hardly expect to persuade more successfully than he, for we have neither his ability nor his apostolic authority. Note, then, that he failed with Festus, a rough soldier, an officer of decent character—one of the most respectable of the Roman governors who ruled Judea (as a whole, a wretched band). He was an administrator of stern, ready justice—very apt, according to Josephus, in the art of hunting down robbers, and generally a shrewd, vigorous, independent, but severe ruler of the province entrusted to him. He was the type of those commonsense business people who are very practical, very just, very fond of facts, but who consider nothing to be worth their thoughts that has anything like sentiment in it, or that deals with abstract truth.

“You are beside yourself,” is the way in which Festus puts Paul down. And as if he noticed in Agrippa’s face some little sympathy with the captive Jew, for the monarch’s sake he tones down the

roughness of his remark, by adding, “Much learning has made you mad.” The rough legionary neither knew nor cared much about learning himself, but he felt it a nuisance to be worried with Jewish cavils concerning rites and dogmas, and questions about one Jesus who was dead, but whom Paul affirmed to be alive. He put such speculations all aside, saying to himself, “People who attach importance to such romantic speculations must assuredly be crazed or imbecile.”

Wherever the Gospel is preached, there are people of that kind. “By all means,” they say, “toleration—by all means, and if people like to believe this, or that, or the other, well—let them believe it. Of course, you know, we men of the world do not care a button about such matters. We know too much to commit ourselves to any set of dogmas. We have more practical and rational business to attend to.”

As to investigating the claims of the truth, as to asking what is divinely revealed, as to giving themselves the trouble to study—no, no, no! Everlasting matters are by them, (so wise are they), thought to be trifles. Time is everything, eternity is nothing! This transient life is all—the life everlasting is a thing to be sniffed at! Well, if such men bring grief to the preacher nowadays, he must not marvel, for such was Paul’s burden in his day.

Now let us turn our gaze upon the young scion of the house of Herod, a man of very different mold. He listened attentively. He had always taken an interest in religious questions. He was sprung of a family that, with all their frightful vices, had trembled before the voice of prophecy and Scripture, and like the Herod who heard John gladly, he listened with great attention and interest to Paul. As he weighed the arguments in his mind, he felt that there was a great deal to be said for Paul’s view of the question. He did not half-know but what Paul might be right. Still, he had an “if”. He would rather not think that the prisoner before him was better informed than he, or that such stern teaching demanded obedience from him, and therefore, he closed the discourse with a remark intended to be pleasing to the orator, and he went his way.

Oh, but these Agrippas! These Agrippas! I would almost sooner deal with Festus, for I know what Festus means, and I am not disappointed. And one of these days it may be the Lord will direct an arrow between the joints of Festus’s harness, but this Agrippa utterly deceives me. He is a fair blossom that never knits, and so turns not to fruit. He is almost persuaded.

Yes, and therefore he takes a sitting at our chapel, and he attends the ministry and look, he even drops a tear, but then he would do the same if he sat in a smoky room. He will recollect what is said, too, and when he hears a pungent remark, he will repeat it at the dinner table, and commend the speaker, but then he would have done the same if he had been gratified by an actor at the theater. We are told that he is a good fellow, and well inclined! It may be so, but alas! he is almost persuaded and not quite, and so he is no Christian. He is not in any measure a Christian, although he listens to Christian preaching. He is almost persuaded, yet nothing more.

I wonder whether in Paul’s congregation there was a third sort of hearer! I hope there was—for there were present not only Festus and Bernice, and Agrippa, but doubtless many of the attendants, and certainly, according to the twenty-third verse of the twenty-fifth chapter, the chief captains and principal men of the city were there. Perhaps—though we are not so informed—while Paul was failing with Festus and disappointed with Agrippa, there sat somewhere in the back seats a centurion, or a private soldier, or a Jewish ruler upon whom the truth was falling like soft dew, and into whose heart it was being received as the ocean absorbs the falling shower. Surely he was not left without witness. The seed he was casting on the waters was found again—and though he came up from his dungeon to preach on that occasion bearing precious seed with many tears, doubtless in heaven he rejoices over sheaves which sprang up from that morning’s preaching. Blessed be God, our labor is not in vain in the Lord.

IV. We will now inquire WHY THE HALF-CONVINCED HEARER WAS ONLY “ALMOST PERSUADED”!

Look at Agrippa again. Fix your attention fully upon him, for with some of you he is a photograph of yourselves. The arguments which Paul drew from Scripture and his own personal experience were very

cogent. His way of putting these arguments was exceedingly forcible, and therefore, if Agrippa were not altogether persuaded, it was not the fault of the preacher's matter or manner. Nothing could have been more powerful in either case. Where, then, did the fault lie?

I stand now in the court, and I look around, and I ask myself, “What is the reason why Agrippa is not persuaded?” The argument tells on me, why not on him? As I look around, I notice on the right hand of Agrippa a very excellent reason why he is not convinced, for there sat Bernice, of whom there were very unsavory stories afloat in Josephus's day. She was Agrippa's sister, and is accused of having lived in incestuous intercourse with him. If so, with such a woman at his right hand, I marvel not that Paul's arguments did not fully persuade.

The reason why sinners are not persuaded is, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, their sin—their love of sin! They see, but they will not see—for if they did see, they would have to tear out that right-eye sin, or cut off that right-arm lust—and they cannot consent to that. Most of the arguments against the Gospel are bred in the filth of a corrupt life. He makes the best reasoner as an infidel who is most unholy, because the devil, and his soul together will never keep him short of the fiery arrows of hell. If it were true that Agrippa lived in such degrading sin, it is no wonder that when Paul reasoned so soberly, and so truthfully, Agrippa was almost, but not altogether, persuaded.

If the charge brought against Bernice as to her brother was not altogether true, yet she was beyond all question a shameless woman. She had been originally married to her own uncle, Herod, and was therefore both his niece, and his wife, and her second marriage was soon broken by her unfaithfulness.

Now Agrippa's public and ostentatious associating with her, proved at least that he was in evil company. This is quite sufficient to account for his never being altogether persuaded to be a Christian. Evil company is one of Satan's great nets in which he holds his birds until the time shall come for their destruction. How many would gladly escape, but they are afraid of those around them whom they count to be good fellows, and whose society has become necessary to their mirth.

Oh, you know it, some of you. You know it. You have often trembled while I have told you of your sins, and of the wrath to come, but you have met your bad companion at the door, or you have gone home and attended parties of gaiety, and every godly thought has been quenched, and you have gone back like a dog to his vomit, and like a sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire. Ah, you Agrippas, your Bernices will lead you down to hell. But if Agrippa has his Bernice, Bernice has her Agrippa, and so men and women become mutual destroyers. The daughters of Eve, and the sons of Adam assist each other in choosing their own delusions.

Now that I am in the court, I look around again and think I notice that Agrippa is easily influenced by Festus. Festus is a commonsense rough-and-ready governor, and such men always have power and influence over gentlemen of taste like Agrippa, for somehow the greater the diversity of character, the more influence a man will have upon another. The rough Festus appears to the gentle Agrippa to be his superior, and if he sneers and calls Paul mad—well, Agrippa must not go the length of being persuaded, although he may demonstrate his expertness in Jewish questions by giving a favorable opinion on the case, which may, a little, put Festus down—yet how could he go and dine with the governor if he became quite convinced? What would Festus say? “Ah! two madmen! Is Agrippa also beside himself?” The king can hardly put up with the sarcasms which he foresees. Some people's sneers he could bear, but Festus is a man of shrewdness and common sense, and is so prominent a ruler that a sneer from him would cut him to the quick. Alas! how many are influenced by fear of men!

Oh, you cowards, will you be damned out of fear? Will you sooner let your souls perish than show your manhood by telling a poor mortal that you defy his scorn? Dare you not follow the right though all men in the world should call you to do the wrong? Oh, you cowards! You cowards! How you deserve to perish who have not soul enough to call your souls your own, but cower down before the sneers of fools! Play the man, I pray you, and ask God's grace to help you to do the right as soon as you are convinced, let Festus scoff as he will.

Do you not think, too, that Paul himself had something to do with Agrippa’s not being convinced? I do not mean that Paul had one grain of blame in the case, but he wore decorations during his preaching which probably were not of a pleasing and convincing character to a man of Agrippa’s taste for pomp and ease. Though better than golden ornaments were his chains, Paul seems to have perceived that Agrippa was shocked at Christianity in that peculiar garb, for Paul said, “Except these bonds.” It often happens that looking abroad upon the sorrows of God’s people, ungodly men refuse to take their portion with them. They find that righteous men are frequently sneered at, and called nicknames. Their self-love can hardly run the risk of such inconvenience.

Be a Methodist! No! Presbyterian! No! Truth is all very well, but gold, they say, can be bought too dearly. Men are so moved by the fear of contempt and poverty, that they turn aside from the narrow path, and no reasoning can convince them to follow it, for they are unwilling to encounter the dangers of the heavenly pilgrimage. O that men were wise enough to see that suffering for Christ is honor, that loss for the truth is gain, that the truest dignity rests in wearing the chain upon the arm rather than endure the chain upon the soul.

After all, the great reason why Agrippa was not convinced lay in his own heart—partly in the love of pomp, partly in the dread of his master Nero at Rome, partly in his superficial, and artificial character, but mainly in his love of sin, and in the struggling of his passions against the divine restraints of the Gospel. The main reason why men are not persuaded to be Christians lies in their own hearts. It is not a flaw in the preacher’s logic, it is a flaw in the hearer’s nature. It is no mistake in the syllogism, it is an error in the hearer’s will. It is not that the reasonings are not powerful, it is that the man does not wish to feel their power, and so endeavors to elude them. I ask your consciences, you who are not convinced, whether I have not fairly stated some of the causes which create and prolong your halting between two opinions, and if I have, may God’s grace help you to confess them, and then may it deliver you from their power.

V. Lastly, I have to show THE EVIL THAT WILL FOLLOW UPON BEING ONLY ALMOST PERSUADED.

The first evil is that if a man is only almost convinced, *he misses altogether the blessing*, which being fully persuaded to be a Christian would have brought him. A leaky ship went out to sea, and a passenger was almost persuaded not to trust his life in it, but he did so, and he perished. A bubble speculation was started in the city, and a merchant was almost persuaded not to have shares in it, but he bought the scrip, and his estate went down in the general shipwreck. A person exceedingly ill heard of a remedy reputed to be most effectual, and he was almost persuaded to take it, but he did not, and therefore the disease grew worse and worse. A man who proposed to go into a subterranean vault in the dark was almost persuaded to take a candle, but he did not, and therefore he stumbled and fell to his death.

You cannot have the blessing by being almost persuaded to have it. Your hunger cannot be appeased by almost eating, nor your thirst quenched by almost drinking. A culprit was almost saved from being hanged, for a reprieve came five minutes after he was hung, but alas! he was altogether dead despite the almost escape. A man who has been almost persuaded to be saved, will at the last be altogether damned. His being almost convinced will be of no conceivable service to him. This seems so grievous, that the life of God, and the light of God, and the heaven of God should glide by some of you, and you should be almost persuaded, and yet should miss them through not being Christians.

Worse still, in addition to the loss of the blessing, there certainly comes *an additional guilt* to the man who, being almost persuaded, yet continues in his sin. A person has rebelled against the government—in hot haste he has taken side with the rioters, but he is afterwards very sorry for it, and he asks that he may be forgiven—let mercy have free course. But another offender has been reasoned with. He has been shown the wickedness of treason. He has seen clearly the evil of taking up arms against the commonwealth, and he has been almost persuaded to be loyal. I say when he becomes a rebel, he is a traitor with a vengeance, to whom no mercy can be shown.

The man who is almost persuaded to be honest, and yet deliberately becomes a thief, is a rogue indeed. The murderer who almost saves his victim's life in the moment of passion, pausing because almost persuaded to forego revenge, and after all, deliberately kills his enemy, deserves death beyond all others. The man who is deliberately an enemy to Christ, who presumptuously rejects the offer of peace, in calm moments puts from him the precious blood, who is almost persuaded, but yet by desperate effort overcomes his conscience—such a man shall go down to the pit with a millstone about his neck that shall sink him to the lowest hell. You almost persuaded ones, I pray you look at this and tremble.

Once more. To have been almost persuaded, and yet not to be a Christian *will lead to endless regrets*, for will not this thought bubble up in the seething soul amidst its torments forever—“I was almost persuaded to repent. Why did I go on in my sin? I was almost persuaded to put my trust in Jesus. Why did I still cling to my self-righteousness and vain ceremonies? I was almost persuaded to forsake my evil companions, and to become a servant of God, but I am now cast away forever, where no more persuasions can melt my heart.

“Oh, my cursed sin! Alas! that I should have been fascinated by its temporary sweetness, and for the sake of it should have incurred this never-ending bitterness. Oh, my madness! Oh, my insanity, that I should have chosen the lies which did but mock me, and allowed my Savior and His salvation to pass me by!” I dare not attempt to picture the remorse of spirits shut up in the cells of despair. Suffice it to say the dread truth is clear—a man cannot come so near to the verge of persuasion, and yet with desperate obstinacy start back from the great salvation without incurring the hot displeasure of the God of mercy—without also bringing upon himself the doom of a suicide in having destroyed his own soul, and put from him the mercy of Jesus Christ.

How I wish I knew how to plead with you this morning! How earnestly I would persuade those of you who are halting between two opinions! Some of you have but a little time to be halting in—your wavering will soon be over, for your death warrants are signed, and the angel of death has spread his wings to the blast, to bring the fatal summons down. The grave is appointed for some of you within a few weeks or months. You shall not trifle with God long.

O, I pray you, I beseech you, if you have any concern for yourselves, and have any sound reason left, seek that your peace may be made with God through the precious blood of Christ, that you may be ready to stand before your Maker's bar, for stand there you must and will, ere many days are past. If you should live another thirty or forty years, how short that time is, and how soon will it be past!

Consider your ways now. Today is the accepted time, today is the day of salvation. The Lord persuade you. I have done my best. He can do it. The Lord the Holy Ghost create you anew and make you Christians, and His shall be the glory forever. Amen and Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—ACTS 26.

Taken from The C. H. Spurgeon Collection, Version 1.0, Ages Software. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.